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Police question Skolnick's parents: no clue

By Larry Weintraub

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The mother of missing legal researcher Sherman H. Skolnick said Wednesday she spoke to her son the day his disappearance was reported, and he promised to call her the next day.

Mrs. Max Skolnick, in tears through most of a 20-minute interview with Chicago Police Department investigators, said Skolnick had told her "Everything was OK" and he planned to go to court later Monday.

That was before he left the house at 9800 S. Oglesby for a meeting that was supposed to provide him with new information on a case he had been investigating — the bugging of the Watergate Hotel Democratic Party headquarters.

Aides said Skolnick left at 8:15 a.m. carrying his files on the case.

The aides, members of the Citizens Committee to Clean Up the Courts, which Skolnick heads, said the organization's records on the Watergate matter were in the missing car.

They fear that Skolnick, 42, and his long-

time driver, David Hoffman, 30, met with foul play. The controversial legal researcher had a standard security procedure when he went on such missions.

He would call his headquarters upon arrival to say he was all right.

He did not call Monday.

About 15 investigators from the Area 2 Youth Section were working on the case Wednesday and a spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation office here and the FBI was "closely monitoring" the case.

A nationwide alert has been issued for the 1973 Ford Pinto station wagon that carried Skolnick from his South Side home. The red auto is new and bears no license plates, only a "license applied for" sticker.

Lt. Vincent Burke of the Chicago youth section said in the three days Skolnick has been missing, "We've run down many leads and come out with a great big zero."

Lt. Burke said Skolnick's parents and a brother who lives in a suburb had been questioned. He asked that their addresses not be made public.

It was Skolnick's practice to call his mother every morning. He is a bachelor, confined to a wheel chair because of childhood polio, and has a close relationship with his parents, who live on the North Side.

Skolnick is widely known in the Chicago area because of legal actions he has filed that led to reapportionments and the resignations of two Illinois Supreme Court justices. He also has affected the careers of other court officials with his investigations.

The possibility has been raised that Skolnick slipped away to Washington to reveal his information on the Watergate affair and on his allegation that it is linked to the December crash of a commercial airliner at Midway Airport.

James R. Thompson, U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, said he had no knowledge of such a connection. He also denied, insofar as he knows, that Skolnick is in federal custody.

The committee has charged he was seized by the government to keep him quiet.